OUR APPROACH

Tackling Information Disorder

BBC MEDIA ACTION

Introduction

This paper presents BBC Media Action's approach to tackling information disorder (including mis- and disinformation).

While not a new phenomenon, information disorder is proliferating at a speed and scale not seen before, largely due to advances in technology, increasing access to both traditional and social media, and changes in how people interact with information. The problem is context specific and affects different groups of people in different ways, but has negative impacts across all BBC Media Action's areas of work.

This paper outlines our understanding of the problem and details our approach to tackling information disorder, drawing on two decades of experience across research, capacity strengthening, multi-media content production and outreach.

Underpinning our response is our belief that the principles of public service broadcasting have never been so relevant. Supplying accurate, trusted and trustworthy information on media platforms that collectively reach people at scale is one of the most effective antidotes and responses to the pressing challenges of information disorder.

Recognising the psychological factors that contribute to information disorder, we use our research to understand what drives different people's engagement with, trust in, and reaction to information. This informs our production of compelling content that is emotionally engaging and seeks to understand and reflect (rather than fuel) the fears, concerns, values and motivations of diverse audiences. This helps us produce content tackling information disorder that is able to 'cut through' with different target audiences, maximising impact.

Our projects tackle information disorder by providing audiences with accurate, trusted and engaging information, and improving media and digital literacy. We also use story-telling approaches to help people recognise the psychological factors at play in how they engage with information, and to shape beliefs, attitudes and norms about what safe and responsible information consumption, production and sharing involves.

We also work with media practitioners and local and national media organisations to strengthen their capacity to provide accurate, trusted information and take steps to tackle information disorder. This includes strengthening editorial processes, production, journalism skills and use of audience research, building skills around conducting investigative journalism and applying fact and source-checking approaches.

Our broader approach to strengthening media ecosystems also contributes to tackling information disorder by supporting the wide availability of relevant, engaging and trusted public-interest content, creating or supporting networks and coalitions of media and civil society organisations working to tackle information disorder (e.g. fact-checking networks) and increasing the capacity of media to produce content that tackles information disorder on an ongoing basis.

As a result of BBC Media Action's work to tackle information disorder, people and media organisations take action to reduce the consumption, production and sharing of information that is false or misleading. This builds resilience to information disorder across societies and contributes to healthier information ecosystems.

Information disorder:
A collective term to capture the range of disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, rumours, myths, conspiracy theories, hyper-partisan content, propaganda and manipulated media that contribute to the spread of false or misleading information.
Source: First Draft

Disinformation:
Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country. This may be to stir up anger or violence or cause confusion to benefit a particular actor personally, politically or financially. Disinformation can become misinformation when those spreading it believe that it is true.
Source: UNESCO

Misinformation:
Information that is false, but not spread with the intention of causing harm.
Source: UNESCO

Information disorder and why it matters

The spread of information that is false or misleading – whether by word-of-mouth, media, or otherwise – is an age-old phenomenon.[1] Yet advances in technology, increasing access to both traditional and social media and changes in how people interact with information (e.g. declining levels of trust in news[2], people becoming more active producers and sharers of content and wishing to create a 'social identity' through information sharing) are propelling the spread of false information at a speed and scale not seen before. This has resulted in information ecosystems that are dangerously affected by information disorder. The rate of change has outpaced measures that could curb the problem, leaving people susceptible to consuming, sharing or acting on false and misleading information. This matters for people making critical decisions about their lives and livelihoods and influences how they participate in society and interact with each other.

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Sources of information disorder vary, from governments or politicians, scammers, conspiracy theorists or celebrities, to religious or traditional leaders, relatives and friends.[3] Trusted public figures (e.g. journalists, celebrities, politicians, local or religious leaders) can amplify false or misleading information that might have remained 'fringe' by drawing attention to it among large audiences.

There are numerous reasons why people create, consume and share false or misleading information: to be helpful or cope with uncertainty; to feel a sense of belonging; for fun; to discredit it; or to cause harm. This information can originate in face-to-face conversations in a community and spread online, or it can spread from online to offline, potentially reaching groups with no internet access at all.[4] Those who seek to spread false or misleading information deliberately to cause harm may create disinformation themselves[5], or, as is increasingly the case, they may focus more on amplifying existing false and misleading information already circulating.[6] Those who feel marginalised, excluded or unrepresented by those in positions of power may be more susceptible to false or misleading information, particularly if the perpetrators of it seek to take advantage of their vulnerabilities. Understanding these various factors can help us shape responses to the issue.

> "Advances in technology, increasing access to both traditional and social media, and changes in how people interact with information are propelling the spread of false information at a speed and scale not seen before."

The problem of information disorder is context specific, affecting different groups to varying degrees and in different ways. Factors such as discriminatory gender and social norms (e.g. the different challenges men and women face in accessing reliable, trustworthy and relevant information, or misogyny that women experience online)[7], the information one consumes, the level of trust in sources, habits around media consumption and online behaviour and media, what constitutes social approval in different online communities[8], normative online behavioural expectations[9], and digital literacy skills all influence how people can be affected.

The importance of an issue and the level of uncertainty that exists around it can also influence how prevalent and enduring the information disorder is around it.[10] Too much, too little, conflicting or confusing information can all affect how we understand and experience a situation.

IMPACTS OF INFORMATION DISORDER

Governance & rights	Health	Resilience and humanitarian response
• Lack of trust in democratic processes • Distortion of political debate • Marginalisation/ demonisation of certain groups • Increased polarisation • Reduced social cohesion • Catalyst for violence and conflict	• Increased apathy, confusion or mistrust of effective prevention or treatment • Belief in and use of ineffective or dangerous health behaviours • Lack of trust in science and medicine • Vaccine hesitancy	• Distortion of understanding about climate change • False or misleading information exacerbating emergencies • Reduced capacity to make accurate risk calculations • People exposed to fraud and manipulation

Impacts on governance and rights

Information disorder has influenced governance, politics and elections in many contexts.[11] For example there is clear evidence of its impact on the 2016 US elections[12], the 2016 Brexit vote in the UK[13], recent elections (2019) in Nigeria[14], India[15] and Indonesia[16], and during recent political turmoil in Algeria (2019).[17]

Disinformation often seeks to inflame differences and divisions in societies between those of different political allegiance, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, socio-economic group or immigration status, for instance. Misinformation can perpetuate false beliefs about different groups in society, encouraging discrimination, normalising prejudices, reducing social cohesion and, in some cases, acting as a catalyst for violence and conflict.[18]

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Impacts on health

False or misleading information can negatively affect health. Those working in public health have long battled false information and misinformed beliefs around, for example, the effectiveness of vaccines[19], myths and misconceptions about how to prevent pregnancy[20] and well-funded disinformation campaigns about the impact of tobacco.[21] The COVID-19 pandemic has occurred in the era of global hyper-connectivity. The World Health Organisation (WHO) described the overwhelming amount of information and the confusion this can cause about what and who to trust as an 'infodemic'. Part of the problem has been the proliferation of mis/disinformation[22], including claims about the origin and reason for the spread of the coronavirus[23], methods to protect oneself from infection and illness and the development, safety[24] and efficacy of potential vaccines.

Impacts on the resilience of people and the planet

Information disorder limits societal engagement on possible solutions to climate change.[25] It can contribute to flawed risk calculations, leading individuals, businesses and governments to over-or under-prepare for natural hazards, misallocate valuable resources and endanger individuals unnecessarily. It can lead people to make poor financial decisions and expose them to fraud or manipulation.

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Moments of crisis are often marked by high uncertainty, the breakdown of formal systems and people either desperate for or overwhelmed by information. Information disorder in these situations can exacerbate emergencies, leading people into harm's way, impeding them from accessing relief services or compounding psychological stress and trauma.

The information disorder crisis in focus

As individuals and societies, many of us are now exposed to information and content – some of it false – in huge quantities. Research suggests that we are now so inundated with information that we inevitably share false information[26] – often unintentionally – because we have not adapted cognitive strategies to process the amount of information to which we are exposed.[27] The internet, social media and 'dark social' media have contributed significantly to this increase in information. Traditional media platforms still play an important role too: as a source of content then spread digitally (e.g. a clip of a TV show shared online); and as an amplifier of information originating online (e.g. when viral content spreading online is discussed on a TV programme). In some settings there are people (e.g. older people or those living in very rural areas) who are still vulnerable to false and misleading information due to having a very limited range of information sources.

A number of factors that affect how society receives, creates and shares information help to explain why information disorder has become such a pressing challenge.

> "Those who spread false or misleading information deliberately to cause harm may create disinformation themselves, or they may focus more on amplifying existing false and misleading information already circulating."

Our psychological relationship with information: It is easy for us to be misled. Psychological studies show that we do not have a rational relationship with information – rather we are attracted to information that engages us emotionally, has a strong narrative and reinforces our pre-existing cultural beliefs ('confirmation bias').[29] One of the reasons information disorder is so prevalent and can be dangerous is that it often meets these criteria, for example by being steeped in emotive language (e.g. tapping into feelings of aspiration, hope, insecurity, fear or frustration or invoking pride, anger or hostility) and being designed to be attention-grabbing. As humans we tend to associate familiarity with truth so the more we see or hear something, the more likely we are to believe it (the 'illusory truth effect'[30]). Consequently, it is much easier for us to ignore or resist information that challenges our world view rather than engage with it, and the more we see false or misleading information, the more it 'sticks'.[31] This trait can be particularly prevalent when we are in a moment of crisis or stress, feel powerless or lack answers. Similarly, the way we critique and evaluate information depends on what mood we are in – when we are stressed, emotional or confused we can be more vulnerable to, and more likely to share, false and misleading information.[32]

The way social media platforms are designed: Social media platforms and the algorithms that drive them are designed to engage us by prioritising content that matches our desire for information that confirms our existing beliefs or our preference for emotionally engaging content, over accurate, diverse or less emotionally engaging content. These platforms also encourage performative behaviour online, as we are encouraged to post content that is most likely to trigger reactions from others in our social network or seek to fit in with others.[33] In this context it is difficult for rational, fact-based news approaches to win out in competition for audience attention against more emotive content. This is fundamentally affecting how we consume, react to and share information. People increasingly receive information that matches their existing beliefs, discuss issues in 'echo chambers' with people who have similar opinions, or engage in discussion around issues where the most polarising and emotive views are given prominence by the algorithms determining what content people see. This is contributing to increasing polarisation around certain issues or between different communities, giving greater prominence to those with extreme views and creating a space in which false and misleading content can flourish.

> **"There has been an increase in people wanting to be 'ahead of the curve', the use of social media to shape social identity and a culture of seeking 'social approval' online."**

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Social media has created a whole new 'world of interactive information': It has given people who were previously passive consumers of information the opportunity to create, alter, share and discuss information in a way that was not possible before. A consequence of this has been an increase in people wanting to be (or be seen to be) 'ahead of the curve' in terms of consuming, repurposing or sharing information (online or offline), the use of social media to shape social identity and a culture of seeking 'social approval' online.[34]

Social and gender norms influencing online behaviours: People's behaviour online and the extent to which online content influences them is shaped by social and gender norms.[35] They are influenced by what they think others think or are doing online, or what they think others approve or disapprove of (e.g. gender norms may influence who feels confident expressing their opinion online).[36] These norms vary depending on the

offline and online community(ies) people are part of[37] and can impact on their likelihood to create or spread information disorder, their exposure to different types of information disorder and the ways in which they respond to it.

Fundamental challenges affecting the availability and use of reliable information sources: Unprecedented challenges to traditional funding models for public-interest media and journalism, fragmentation of the media, exclusion or misrepresentation of marginalised groups, political and business influence over media organisations, the explosion in the number of people or publishers disseminating 'news' not subject to traditional journalistic principles, and the increase in 'contributed discovery' (where we get our information via what people share on social media, rather than directly from the original source, e.g. a news organisation) have all affected the availability and use of accurate, balanced, inclusive and trusted information sources.

The emergence of 'dark social' media[38] sources for trusted information: 'Dark social' media includes private and semi-private information-sharing spaces, such as WhatsApp and other chat apps. Here, people are more likely to trust those with whom they are exchanging information because they tend to have some connection with them (e.g. family or friends), and are therefore more likely to believe and share the false or misleading information they receive. The negative impact of this has been well documented in recent elections in Nigeria[39] and India[40] and during the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2018-19.[41]

Societal shifts in how people define 'truth' and 'facts': For instance by placing more value on personal experience than the opinion of 'experts' and the declining levels of trust and confidence in elites, political actors and systems and public institutions, including the media.[42]

Traditional media as a source and amplifier of information disorder: In many contexts, traditional media plays a role in the spread of information disorder by amplifying false or misleading information that originates online[43], giving a platform to those that create or reinforce such information (e.g. politicians, celebrities and other influencers) or being the main source of government-sponsored disinformation (e.g. in countries where there is a high level of political influence over media organisations). In some contexts, traditional media is more trusted than information online, meaning false or misleading information shared through traditional platforms may be believed more readily and have greater impact than if seen online. Traditional media may also reach audiences who are not exposed to this information online (e.g. older or more rural audiences).

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Methods of creation, detection and dissemination of information disorder are likely to advance along with technology: This is already evident in the use of deep fakes[44] and artificial intelligence to both create and identify disinformation.[45]

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BBC Media Action's role

There are no easy fixes or singular solutions to information disorder, but BBC Media Action delivers a range of interventions that can help to tackle this issue, drawing on two decades of experience across research, capacity strengthening, multi-media content production and outreach that supports audiences and positively influences media ecosystems. Strategies to best respond to information disorder will vary by country, context and target audience. A combination of approaches, in partnership with other organisations, is likely to be most effective.

> "BBC Media Action delivers a range of interventions that can help to tackle information disorder, drawing on two decades of experience across research, capacity strengthening, multi-media content production and outreach that supports audiences and positively influences media ecosystems."

The large scale of the problem demands a large-scale response. Our projects and programmes reached more than 130 million people last year, through partnerships with over 200 media organisations.[46] Many of our media partners and long-running programmes have earned audiences' trust, which we can build on to tackle information disorder.

We recognise there are many different organisations working to tackle information disorder, bringing different skills and approaches to doing so (e.g. using AI to identify false or misleading information, implementing in-person media literacy work in schools or working to influence regulation of social media companies). In line with our organisational strategy, we collaborate with a range of actors working in this area in order to develop multi-faceted approaches that evolve with rapidly changing ecosystems and needs. We share what we learn as we do so. We tackle information disorder across all our thematic areas of work, as well as in stand-alone projects.

Launch of our Navrangi Re TV drama, which uses storytelling to influence health behaviour

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OUR IMPACT

As a result of BBC Media Action's work to tackle information disorder, people and media organisations take actions that reduce the consumption, production and sharing of information that is false or misleading. This strengthens resilience to information disorder and contributes to healthier information ecosystems.

OUR OUTCOMES

BBC Media Action works to ensure that people in all their diversity have:

- **Increased access to, and consumption of, accurate and inclusive information and trusted engaging content** on issues of importance to their lives.
- **Better knowledge about the impact of information disorder** and how this affects different people (e.g. women and girls) and understand the harm that can be caused by producing and sharing false and misleading information.
- **Improved media and digital literacy knowledge and skills (including the critical appraisal of information and emotional scepticism):** that help them navigate their information ecosystem with care, identify false and misleading information and consume, produce and share information in a more considered, safe and responsible way.
- **Increased skills and confidence to constructively challenge friends or family who are sharing false or misleading information.**
- **Attitudes and beliefs that value factual information and discourage the production, consumption and sharing of false or misleading information.** In turn this will create a **shift in norms** about what is and is not acceptable information to produce, consume and share.
- **Wider exposure to a diversity of views and opinions:** that better reflect inclusive, reasoned public debate and fact-based arguments, rather than extreme and polarising opinion.

BBC Media Action works to ensure that media practitioners and organisations have:

- **Knowledge and awareness of information disorder**, including why it spreads and what impact it has on different groups of people (e.g. women and girls).
- **Skills, networks and coalitions to identify and respond to harmful information disorder** when it occurs, including fact and source-checking approaches.
- **Skills to investigate and challenge public figures responsible for creating or perpetuating information disorder**, contributing to greater accountability for those who do so.
- **Skills to produce accurate, trusted and engaging content** on issues of importance to the lives of their audiences, built on strong understanding of audiences. This includes the ability to address the attitudes, beliefs, norms and behaviours their audiences hold in relation to information disorder.

Across media ecosystems BBC Media Action contributes to:

- **Providing relevant, inclusive, engaging and trusted public-interest content** that helps to tackle information disorder.
- **Building networks of media partners** that share knowledge and resources related to tackling information disorder, and defending and protecting media freedom with civil society and other allies. This in turn supports the provision of public interest media that helps to tackle information disorder.
- **Providing media organisations with management skills and financial models** that enable them to be viable, resilient and able to produce content that tackles information disorder on an ongoing basis.
- **Strengthening legal, regulatory and economic environments that are more enabling for public interest media** that can tackle information disorder.

Media ecosystems are the dynamic systems of relationships between various actors, processes and structures that influence how media content is generated, shared, consumed and used. The components of a media ecosystem are interdependent and interconnected and include: ordinary people who access, share and ascribe meaning to media and information; dedicated content producers, such as media outlets, practitioners and bloggers; formal bodies and networks that monitor and defend media; and the wider system of cultural, legal and power structures and actors that influence the operating environment for media. Media ecosystems can be considered at different scales and may extend beyond nation states.

OUR WORK

We achieve these changes by taking a creative, multi-pronged approach to tackling information disorder across four complementary areas of work.

Research

We recognise that information disorder is complex and context specific. Research to understand media and information ecosystems and the diverse audiences within them is at the heart of BBC Media Action's approach.

Our in-country research capacity[47], established community feedback mechanisms[48] and links with BBC Monitoring mean that we are able to identify key information disorder trends in a particular context, understand how false and misleading information is spreading and examine how it is affecting different groups of people.

We use research to establish where and how different groups of people consume, produce and share information, what drives trust in particular information sources and what broader attitudes and norms are influencing this. We also explore how people's emotions, concerns, beliefs, values and motivations drive their engagement with and reaction to false and misleading information. This helps us to identify which audiences are most susceptible and vulnerable to information disorder and why, so we can design context-specific responses, framed in a way that take account of the emotional state, fears and values of audiences. Consequently, our responses to information disorder are relevant and engaging and, ultimately, have more impact. We test and monitor content to adapt our approach and evaluate its impact on audiences. We also use research to inform and evaluate our media capacity strengthening work. We work with relevant partners and academics to strengthen our research, helping us build our understanding of which approaches work best to tackle information disorder, and why. We share this learning with others.

Multi-media content

BBC Media Action has two decades of experience in working with partners to provide access to accurate, inclusive, trusted information and designing media and communication outputs that can increase knowledge and skills, influence attitudes and beliefs, shape societal norms and, ultimately, affect behaviour.[49]

We work with radio, television, digital and mobile to engage diverse audiences at scale across whole societies. Our programmes, co-productions, partner productions and digital content employ a wide variety of formats including debates, documentary, magazines, call-ins, drama, reality and fast-fiction (short audio dramas) to tackle information disorder. The programming we support or produce is multi-lingual and often features trusted communicators (e.g. health professionals, religious or traditional leaders, social influencers and celebrities) so that content is accessible to and influential with audiences.

Recognising the psychological factors that contribute to information disorder, we use our research to understand what drives different people's engagement with, trust in, and reaction to information, so that we can create compelling content that is emotionally engaging and seeks to understand and reflect (rather than judge) the fears, concerns, values and motivations of diverse audiences. This helps us produce content tackling information disorder that is able to 'cut through' with different target audiences, maximising impact.

"Our in-country research capacity, community feedback mechanisms and links with BBC Monitoring mean that we are able to identify key information disorder trends in a particular context, understand how false and misleading information is spreading and examine how it is affecting different groups of people."

Specific strands of our media programming to tackle information disorder include:

Using story-telling approaches to respond to psychological factors and shape attitudes and norms: To really tackle the underlying causes of information disorder we need to support diverse people to recognise the psychological factors at play, and encourage a shift in the culture around information consumption, production and sharing, influencing people's attitudes and beliefs and societal norms in relation to this.

There is strong evidence to show that drama and story-telling approaches can trigger 'observational' or 'social learning' – by listening to or watching the consequences of characters' decisions, people will draw parallels and practise what others do. We aim to tackle information disorder with similar approaches.

Somalia radio drama actors recording in the studio

What we seek to do varies by country, culture, and context, but includes:

- Helping people to understand the psychological factors that make them vulnerable to information disorder and providing them with skills to help mitigate these risks (e.g. developing more emotional scepticism to information);
- Increasing people's media and digital literacy skills and influencing attitudes about the importance of applying these;
- Shifting beliefs and norms about what safe and responsible information consumption, production and sharing involves;
- Decreasing the acceptability of sharing or acting on unconfirmed, misleading or false information;
- Increasing self-efficacy, skills and beliefs around challenging friends and family who share unconfirmed or false information;
- Increasing the value placed on quality news and journalism.

"We use our research to understand what drives different people's engagement with, trust in, and reaction to information, so that we can create compelling content that is emotionally engaging and seeks to understand and reflect (rather than judge) the fears, concerns, values and motivations of diverse audiences."

Improving media and digital literacy: BBC Media Action's approach also seeks to empower people to be more conscious, discerning and aware consumers, producers and sharers of information. One element of this is to improve media and digital literacy[50] (and associated behaviour) among audiences.

Research suggests that interventions to increase media and digital literacy can improve audiences' ability to discern between mainstream and false news headlines[51], encourage scepticism around information quality on social media[52] and reinforce mindful news consumption.[53]

BBC Media Action's approach to media and digital literacy includes use of engaging and innovative formats, such as gamification[54], as there is promising evidence of the impact of this kind of approach on media literacy skills.[55]

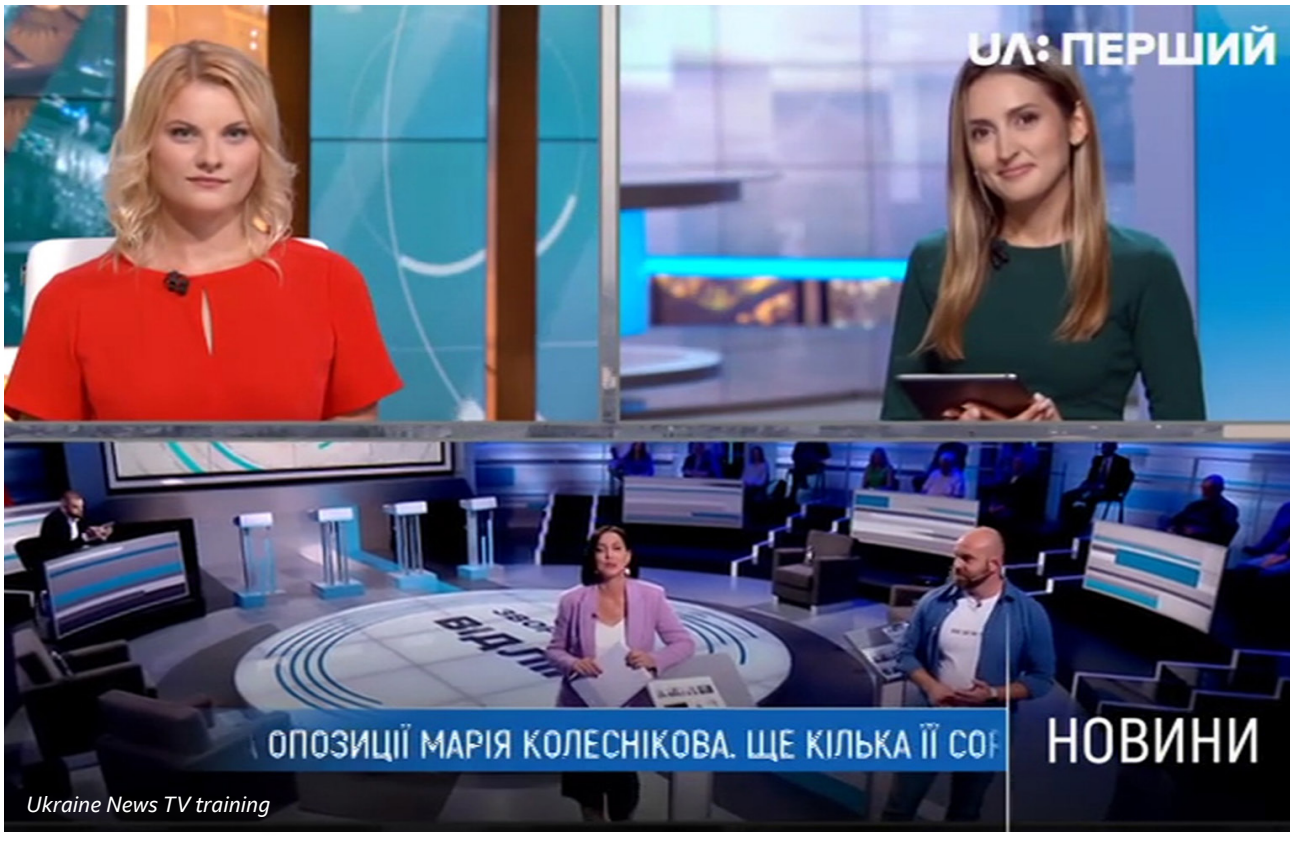
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a 10-part, fast-fiction audio/visual drama series, created by our team in **Indonesia**, deals with the struggles, doubts and solutions to lockdown dilemmas and addresses prevalent false and misleading information circulating around the new coronavirus.

A short video made by our **India** team helps model a separation between impulse and action, encouraging audiences to deliberate on whether to share information they receive on their phone or via social media.

In **Iraq**, a music video to tackle lockdown scepticism and encourage support for the medical services has been viewed over 20 million times.

Exploring 'inoculation' approaches as part of media and digital literacy: An extension of work on media and digital literacy is the potential of 'inoculation' – a social–psychological theory based on warning people about the types of misinformation they may be exposed to, exposing them to an example of that kind of misinformation and then directly 'prebunking' it. Several experimental research studies[56] have shown the promise of this approach, such as by using an online game to reduce the perceived reliability and persuasiveness of 'fake news' articles, and that the approach could be adapted for use within social media environments[57] and could be adapted across different cultures.

Few attempts have yet tested whether the principles of these approaches can be scaled up and applied to mass-reach media content, though there is clear interest in this approach, e.g. as a way to mitigate misinformation about a COVID-19 vaccine.[58] BBC Media Action will develop and test work in this area.



Ukraine News TV training

Capacity strengthening

We work with media practitioners and local and national media organisations to strengthen capacity to provide accurate, trusted information and take steps to tackle information disorder. This includes work with partners to:

- **Strengthen editorial processes, production, journalism skills and use of audience research** to support the production of accurate, balanced and editorially robust content that is relevant to audiences' lives, engages them and gains their trust.
- **Build skills around conducting investigative journalism and producing accountability programming** that challenges and holds to account those producing or disseminating false or misleading information.
- **Build understanding of information disorder**, including why it spreads, what its impact is and how media can help to tackle it.
- **Fact and source check:** We draw on the BBC's world-leading expertise to provide training to media practitioners on fact and source-checking and how best to communicate this to audiences through engaging content. We also support journalists and media organisations to partner and build coalitions and networks with local, regional and global fact-checking initiatives and organisations[59] in order to magnify and coordinate efforts, especially around elections. Fact and source checking are a specialised skill and can be labour intensive – the extent to which we work with media partners to do this depends on the size, resources, business focus and needs of different media partners.

In **Sierra Leone**, ahead of the election in 2018, we trained 700 journalists, electoral workers and young administrators of WhatsApp groups in how to identify mis/disinformation and ensure the information they produced and shared was accurate. Following their training, there was a 25% increase in the number of participants who agreed they could identify false news stories or fake news. BBC Media Action

Where appropriate, we also **work with technical specialists (e.g. medical professionals or climate scientists)** to help build their skills and understanding on how to communicate complex information effectively through the media (e.g. by appearing in programmes) in a way that reduces ambiguity and uncertainty and increases programme makers' use of this information in their programming. In turn this improves audience comprehension of information and helps build resilience to information disorder. For example, when health practitioners are better able to explain how vaccines work or climate and weather scientists have the skill to explain forecasts clearly, the media and their audiences are more likely to understand the issues to hand and make decisions accordingly, with less susceptibility to false or misleading information.

With support from a range of donors including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and Global Affairs Canada, we produced a series of face-to-face and virtual trainings, a handbook and webinars for media practitioners and responders to help them cope with the COVID-19 pandemic (and future pandemics and health emergencies), including tackling information disorder in relation to COVID-19.

The training (adapted to numerous local languages) covered areas including different types of information disorder, fact and source checking approaches, tips for mitigating information disorder and avoiding stigma, and ways to build audience resilience, including to false and misleading information. This has now been delivered to hundreds of journalists, media and digital producers and responders across all the countries in which BBC Media Action works. BBC Media Action

Elements of our **broader approach to strengthening media ecosystems** also contribute to tackling information disorder, including by:

- Supporting the **wide availability of relevant, engaging and trusted public-interest content.**
- **Creating or supporting networks and coalitions** of media and civil society organisations that are working to tackle information disorder (e.g. fact-checking networks) and defend and protect media freedom.
- **Strengthening the management skills of media partners** and supporting them to explore **viable financial models**, so that they are more resilient and able to produce content that tackles information disorder on an ongoing basis.

Face-to-face and networked communication
Encouraging sustained discussion (between people and within communities) and embedding skills are key to our impact. We use face-to-face (e.g. road shows or community events) and networked (e.g. creating online discussion groups or communities) communication to extend our reach, to stimulate information-sharing and problem-solving, to support people to use new skills and to enhance our impact.

This work helps people to understand how information disorder affects them, their family, friends and community. It gives people the opportunity to learn skills they can use to identify false and misleading information, constructively challenge friends or family who are sharing false or misleading information and consume and produce and share information in a more considered, safe and responsible way. It provides people with opportunities to discuss the problem of information disorder with others, including how they can respond (e.g. by hosting a community event to discuss common misconceptions about an important local issue, help people understand why there is false and misleading information circulating and give them tips on how to spot it).

A presenter raises his hand to a crowd at Ishiwi – a roadshow in Zambia

We also use outreach to work with influential groups (e.g. religious or traditional leaders and government officials) who may be key sources of information disorder when they are inadvertently disseminating false or misleading information. We provide them with more accurate information, alert them to the harm they may be doing, encourage them to share accurate information and engage them on potential solutions to tackle information disorder.

We also strengthen relationships between media outlets and other organisations, including civil society organisations (CSOs), working to tackle information disorder, for example by improving information flows between CSOs that may be aware of harmful information circulating in relation to issues they work on, and media organisations that could help to tackle this false and misleading information.

Find out more...

If you would like more information on our approach to tackling information disorder, you are interested in working with us on this issue or you have any other enquiries, please email:

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Endnotes

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[2] See: IPSOS MORI, 'The impact of declining trust in the media' (accessed 14/03/2021).

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